DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 440 941 SP 039 177

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TITLE Interpreting Standards of Practice through Teacher Stories: A Case Study. Ontario College of Teachers.

INSTITUTION Ontario College of Teachers, Toronto.
PUB DATE 2000-04-00
NOTE 31p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 24-28, 2000).
AVAILABLE FROM Ontario College of Teachers, 121 Bloor Street East, 6th Floor, Toronto, Ontario M4W 3M5. Canada. Tel: 416-961-8800; Tel: 888-534-2222 (Toll Free); Fax: 416-961-8822.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Standards; Case Studies; Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; Ethics; *Faculty Development; Foreign Countries; *Personal Narratives; Self Evaluation (Groups); *State Standards; Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Improvement
IDENTIFIERS Ontario

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a validation case study of a new document, "Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession," developed by the Ontario College of Teachers. As part of its mandate as a self-regulatory body, the College is to establish and enforce professional and ethical standards applicable to members of the College. Validation case study activities were designed to augment feedback received from individual members of the College and the public in order to make final revisions to the document. Researchers examined how selected educators perceived the intentions and content of the Standards, investigating their expectations for and impressions of the document. They also explored how teachers could see themselves in the new document. This case highlights one group of teachers making sense of one particular document, describing how 24 classroom teachers were able to identify exemplars of the Standards in the context of their own practice. Teachers shared stories of practice in a workshop format and in writing. Data from presentation feedback, interviews, focus groups, and personal writing standards indicated that given the time to explore the standards document collaboratively, teachers saw strong connections within the standards document to their work. (Contains 15 references.) (SM)

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ED 440 941

Ontario College of Teachers: Interpreting Standards of Practice through Teacher Stories: A Case Study

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Paper presented at the
American Educational Research Association
New Orleans, USA
April 2000

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Interpreting Standards of Practice through Teacher Stories

Introduction

This paper describes one validation case study of a new document entitled *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession*, developed by the Ontario College of Teachers. As part of its mandate as a self-regulatory body the College is to "establish and enforce professional standards and ethical standards applicable to members of the College". The standards document, approved in principle by the Council of the Ontario College of Teachers in December, 1998, provides the foundation for pre-service and in-service programs accredited by the College. Professional growth, the core of teacher professionalism, is developed through these programs and also through ongoing professional learning in practice. The standards describe what it means to be a member of the teaching profession in Ontario and highlight the knowledge skills and values that are inherent to the profession. The Council has now invited members of the profession and the public to participate in a validation process. The purpose of the validation case studies activities is to augment the feedback data we are receiving from individual members of the College and the public in order to make final revisions to the document.

We sought to validate the document by exploring how selected educators perceived the intentions and content of the *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession*. Although the standards of practice were written for the profession as the foundation for program accreditation, they also speak directly to individual teachers. Teachers typically do not see teaching in abstract terms but in terms of their own practice. We were interested in their expectations and impressions of the document. How might the abstract standards be used in practice for professional growth?

In addition we wanted to explore the question, "How can we make a document come alive?" Specifically, how can teachers see themselves in the new document, *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession, June 1999*, created by the Ontario College of Teachers? How can printed words on a page capture the meaning of teaching, the artistry, the skills and values inherent in the practice of teaching? Understanding that words and

lists by themselves are disembodied and formal and cannot communicate the complex nature of the teaching profession, we wanted to investigate how the document could be understood and accepted in context by Ontario teachers.

This case study describes the ways in which twenty-four classroom teachers are able to identify exemplars of the standards of practice in the context of their own practice. The context and process of this involvement and how the teachers make sense of the standards is documented through presentation feedback, interviews, focus groups and personal writing standards will be documented through presentation feedback, interviews, focus groups and personal writing. In this case the focus is on one particular district board with one group of teachers making sense of one particular document. Our guiding questions emerge from the desire to include the voices of individual teachers as well as formal organizational feedback in our response data.

How can the *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession* document be used in practice?
How do teachers see their work within the standards?
How can the standards of practice be used for professional growth?
How can the document come alive?

Beginning the paper with a teacher narrative that positions teachers as generators and users of knowledge constructed from their experience, I outline the purposes and context of the study and describe the case study methodology. I define the case and its contexts through narrative accounts of practice related to the Standards obtained through interviews and personal writing, identifying issues such as teacher leadership, arising from the data. Further narrative description adds the multiple perspectives of the main participants and organizers involved in the study. I conclude by summarizing my understandings about the case and suggest implications for future directions.

A Narrative Beginning

What did I learn about standards and story? The teachers in these studies strongly support the language and content of the standards document. They value the opportunity to talk with colleagues about teaching practice and see the document as a catalyst for such discussion. They delight in sharing stories of teaching practice. In light of this, I chose to use story and narrative accounts as an epistemological tool to capture the essence of teachers' experience. The descriptors listed in the standards are familiar to teachers but written this way they cannot convey the passion of teaching. Louden and Wallace (1996) suggest, lists fail to capture the mystery, the dilemmas and the pleasure of teaching. One of the research participants highlights the issue. "*A descriptor is one thing but what lifts that principle into a breathing reality in the interaction with students? So much work to be done!*" It is my belief that the work to be done can be through teacher stories , narratives of experience that give life to the list of words in the standards document and focus attention on what it means to be a teacher.

When asked to recall a story of practice related to the standards of practice, teachers responded in unique and individual ways. Some stories told were brief vignettes or reflections, others were narratives based on metaphorical images. The stories individuals tell originate in their desire to derive meaning from experience and explain that meaning to others. Polkinghorne, (1988) with others (Mishler, 1986; Bruner, 1990; Denzin, 1989; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Carter, 1993, Beattie, 1995; and Squire, 1997) has explored the theoretical background of narrative in the social sciences and its possibilities for educational research. Polkinghorne, in speaking of the social sciences, argues that these disciplines produce "knowledge that deepens and enlarges the meaning of human existence," (p.159). Beattie (1995) contends that: "Narrative can be used to illuminate the ways in which we understand ourselves as teachers, appraise ourselves and our experience and evoke and bring to life the meaning of those experiences." (p41)

Thus, the inclusion of teacher stories will describe the movement from the abstract principles in the standards document to the intense personal practice of individual

teachers. In the following narrative account we see that movement as we come to understand how Tim, a high school teacher of English and Drama, feels about his role as an associate teacher. He uses the metaphorical image of a Haida totem carver to make connections to the craft and artistry of teaching that he sees in the standards.

An Imperfect Offering

I pictured my time with Andrea – learning to see – forming her sight – sharing mine – so much trust.

I saw, during the visualization, a darkened room. And I realized the art of teaching – so magical – allowed each individual to bring their own light – to discover the richness of that room – the textures, the colours – inside where it matters most. Such an imperfect offering – adjusting our eyes in the dark – trusting the touch of our intuition to guide our ways.

I remember reading a book by Roy Vickers about carving the Haida totem pole. He told stories of climbing on the fallen tree when he was four or five years old, smelling the yellow cedar, touching the bark. He watched the elders carve lines – pure curves, shapes of their visions, what they valued most , gaining respect at such a young age for their craft, filling his nostrils with the fullness of that moment.

It reminded me of Andrea. There I was with Andrea, a student teacher , so bright, knowing so little. She asked beginners' questions. Always the most difficult. And in the naming of what I do I realized how much I bring to my teaching – the grain of my experience, the knots of my practice, all of it defining me even in the smallest imperfections. And every day, carving, not certain of where it will lead, how I will go with the wood, knowing the pressure, when to rest, when to speak. How does a student teacher learn patience? How do they learn that each gift of teaching is an imperfect offering – that's what makes it unique. Get the feel of the practice, ask questions, watch the master at work, respect the mystery of the craft, sometimes in dialogue, often in silence. Three months working with Andrea. They are so bright. They have so much to learn. I learned that teaching is not easy. Most things worthwhile aren't. Tears of frustration. Learning to listen to their fears. Writing daily notes on my own observations, sometimes just a note of encouragement.

In the end Andrea wrote me a letter thanking me. She discovered the confidence to say that she was a writer, a poet, an artist. She found her voice with me and now she carries that voice each day. She brought curiosity. That is her fire. That fuels her initiative and her questioning. That allays her doubts. She gave me a gift. The confidence to say I am a master teacher. An elder at the other end of the pole – carving form and line into work of beauty every day.

And this spring I will be recognized by the University for my daily attention to those student teachers - the associate teacher and mentorship award by the Faculty. Simple recognition of what I already know. And the challenge to find new opportunities to share what I know. To honour my practice, to continue learning by that same sharing. So little time. So much to do. I love the room I'm in, the colours, the textures – my home – my way – my teaching!

Tim's story, based on the metaphor of a master carver, is a particularly evocative response to the invitation to think about the standards of practice and a teaching story. The story of Andrea, his student teacher, speaks clearly to the first standard of practice *commitment to students and student learning*. His sense of empowerment and professional growth as a master teacher reveals his belief in *ongoing professional learning*. Stories such as Tim's help us to understand teachers' perceptions about how their work as professionals might connect to the standards of practice . Although we had substantial data from presentation feedback and document responses, I believed I would gain another level of understanding of the issues surrounding standards through story analysis. As Carter (1993, p.5) suggests," Stories capture more than scores or mathematical formula ever can, the richness and indeterminacy of our experience as teachers". How then did Tim and his colleagues come to write stories of practice and reflect on the *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession*?

Context of the Study

The Ontario College of Teachers was created in 1996 to license, govern and regulate the practice of teaching in Ontario. The 175,000 members of the College include classroom teachers, administrators, superintendents, Ministry of Education and Training staff, Community Colleges, Faculty of Education staff and others who hold Ontario teaching qualifications. An important part of the College's mandate is to provide leadership to the profession in developing standards of practice for the profession and a framework for career long professional learning.

A self-regulatory body must be able to articulate what it is that makes that body unique. In our case it means answering the questions: What makes being a teacher a unique professional experience? Why can't any other caring adult who has a university degree be designated "a teacher"? Professional self-regulatory bodies most often use the term "standard of practice" to refer to the descriptors which answer these kinds of questions. *The standards of practice for the Teaching profession* developed over the last year with substantial input from educators and the public, are organized within five themes:

commitment to students and student learning, professional knowledge, teaching practice, leadership and community, and ongoing professional learning.

The *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession* were developed using a variety of sources and resources. Existing statements from other educational jurisdictions were reviewed. This review included both national and international examples. Standards of practice statements from other self-regulatory bodies in Ontario were also examined. Approximately 500 members of the College and the public contributed through structured research activities to the development of the standards of practice. The structured research activities included interviews, focus groups, and written responses to questions posed on the College web site and in College publications. In addition, many participants offered feedback through e-mail, discussion groups, writing teams and written correspondence. Based on our research, *The Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession* reflect the thinking and indeed the words of many educators across Ontario.

A preliminary draft was reviewed by more than 600 members of the college and the public who engaged in developmental feedback sessions. As well many groups and individuals provided written responses. The issues brought forward in these responses provided the basis for revision. Once the document had been modified to reflect the suggestions of respondents the Governing Council passed the Standards of Practice in principle and approved a yearlong validation process, January 1999 to December 1999. There are several levels to the current validation activities. The Standards were published on the College web site with an invitation to respond. The document was distributed to over 3000 College members and the public who had been part of the developmental stages. In addition every member of the College received a copy of the Standards of Practice with a response form in the March, 1999 edition of Professionally Speaking/Pour parler profession. These data gathering strategies have been expanded by eight case studies which investigate validation through implementation within a specific context. Examples of case studies include standards of practice in the context of pre-service education, teacher leadership and the standards of practice, a board-wide

mentoring program based on the standards of practice, and an examination of the standards of practice within an Additional Qualification course.

Methodology

A case study methodology was selected for this particular validation activity. According to Merriam (1988) "a case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomena or social unit" (p.21). She sees a case study as a suitable methodology if the researcher's interest is in process. Process is viewed in terms of monitoring a situation "describing the context and population of the study and discovering the extent to which the ... program has been implemented, providing immediate feedback of a formative type" (1998, p.33). Drawing on Merriam's definitions the standards of practice document can be considered as "the program." The introduction of the Standards to a specific group within the OCDSB can be construed as a specific phenomena . The inquiry will, through its heuristic qualities, discover contextual characteristics that will illuminate our understanding of the issues surrounding the implementation of the standards document. Yin (1994) also highlights the notion of context in a case study. He suggests "A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomena within its real life context especially when the boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly evident "(p. 13). It was my intent to position the case study within the real life experience of teachers through the process of narrative inquiry.

The case is also evaluative in nature based on "description, explanation and judgement," (Merriam 1998, p. 39). Stake (1995) believes that all evaluation studies are case studies with the program being studied as the case. Case study knowledge, according to Stake, is more concrete, more contextual and more developed by reader interpretation. Rather than making broad generalizations from this case, I encourage notion of user generalizability . The practitioner determines the applicability of one case to another and will take from this detailed examination of one situation what is useful for their

particular situation. Merriam (1988) proposes four considerations for selecting a case study methodology:

- The nature of the research question
- the amount of control
- the desired end product
- can a bounded system be identified.

"How and why" questions according to Yin (1994) are appropriate for a case study. The guiding questions for our research fell into this category. If we wish to explore in depth the way in which teachers are understanding the *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession,* we must examine the interplay of multiple factors that constitute the particular phenomena of introducing the standards document. A bounded system can readily be identified. In this case the focus was on one particular board with one group of teachers making sense of one particular document. As researcher I sought to emphasize the participants' interpretation of the document and understand the case as embedded in a particular context. Emergent design leading to new understandings dependent on inductive reasoning took precedence over tight variable control. Similarly, the desired end product was not a quantification of variables or a description of cause and effect but rather a holistic intense description of a contemporary phenomena.

Positioning the Study

The case study was conducted in the Ottawa Carleton District School Board, a large urban board that serves 80,000 students in 150 schools with 7,000 teaching staff. The board is in the second year of amalgamation between two very distinct organizations. As part of the amalgamation reorganization a new position, "principal of staff development" was established. Margaret Dempsey, an experienced administrator, was appointed to the role. Margaret is also an elected member of the Council of the Ontario College of Teachers and as such had indicated an interest in supporting validation activities that would also benefit her teachers and staff development in the Ottawa/Carleton District School Board. It is important to note that in combining the

two roles Margaret took a risk. Misunderstandings and skepticism about the College's role still remain in some school communities due in part to misinformation about the College's purposes. In the process of establishing her own credibility in her new portfolio, Margaret ran the risk of being linked negatively with a "top down" College initiative. In fact, at the conclusion of the research the group requested that they might continue the standards conversations with Margaret into the next year and develop a system wide in-service plan for *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession*. Her summary comment at the end of the research indicates this reaction.

That first session was risky but I am overjoyed with the project beyond my wildest dreams... it has reaffirmed the tremendous professionalism of teachers and the tremendous commitment to students and to their craft...also they understand more the reasons for the College and are willing to go out and speak positively about it.....

After consultations with the superintendents and the director it was decided that there was merit for the Ottawa/Carleton District School Board in working with the College. A memo to the directors' council January 5, 1999 reads:

> "The following pilot project between the OCDSB and OCT is proposed. Superintendents of Schools be invited to select a sample of 24 classroom teachers 12 secondary and 12 elementary to work with Fran Squire, Program Officer, OCT and OCDSB representatives on the Standards and how these standards impact on the teaching practices of teachers. The goal for both OCDSB and OCT is the development of best teaching practices and the critical reflection of teachers on their own teaching practices. "

Margaret reflected on her original objectives for the project.

"my original aim was really to look at staff development and what teachers would need from us as staff developers to help them truly live the Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession but in taking it through I began to realize that
a) the teachers needed first of all to ***be aware*** *of the Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession;*

b) they would have to buy into it and internalize it before they could give me any feedback as to what they thought they would need for future growth."

As in many studies with emergent designs, Margaret's purpose for the study changed as the case evolved. She discovered the real purpose was to *"have conversations around best practice and to use the group of 24 as ambassadors to help get discussions going in schools, in superintendencies…to find out how the standards can help teachers focus and not be an obstacle or a barrier."*

Researcher Role

Theoretical sensitivity (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) gained by my background experience and knowledge of the board and my past working relationship with Margaret helped me understand the issues within the board context. As a former teacher in the bounded system I was considered by the group both as an insider who held some measure of credibility and as an outsider from OCT. I knew however, only one participant in the group of 24 . My research role was one of presenter, interpreter and constructor of knowledge. A constructivist view involves presenting "thick description " (Geertz, 1973) rich data and interpretations from which the reader can generalize.

As researcher I make decisions filtered through my own theoretical perspectives, decisions about what data to collect, how to analyze it and deciminate the findings. These decisions constitute ethical issues which the researcher must address in a responsible way. The participants were aware of the purpose of the study and voluntarily offered their writing, understanding that it might be published. The drafts of the report were shared with Margaret and the three profiled teachers. To balance my personal involvement and bias I have included both positive and negative data about the standards, respecting the rights of individual participants.

The Participants

Margaret and I chose to have a purposive (Chein, 1981) or purposeful (Patton, 1990) sample of 24 teacher/participants, based on criteria or attributes essential to the study. We decided to limit our sample to an equal number of elementary and secondary

classroom teachers who had volunteered for the project. A homogeneous group of classroom teachers was selected because of their direct experience with students and classrooms and because we wanted to create a comfortable peer milieu in which professional stories and opinions might be shared. Memos of invitation were sent by superintendents to their school administrators who in turn invited teachers to participate. The teachers would be given release time for a full day session on the standards and a half day follow-up session. Aware of teachers' busy schedules and skepticism about the College, Margaret was surprised to receive over 80 applications. A random selection was made in the elementary and secondary applicants to create a pilot workshop group of 24. The groups' experience ranged from a first year teacher to several teachers just months away from retirement. The teachers represented a diversity of subjects, grade levels and teaching styles. According to Margaret, some participants volunteered because they were strong federation advocates, cautious and curious about the College's involvement in standards. Others put their names forward because they were ready for a philosophical conversation about standards, best practices and the craft of teaching, a discussion they felt could not easily happen at a school level. Several others had strong feelings about teachers' qualifications and professional learning that they wanted a College representative to hear. Detailed profiles will be provided for the three participants who were involved in interviews and personal writing submissions.

Chronology of Events

January	Planning with M. Dempsey and OCDSB officials
February	Standards workshop - full day
March/April	E-mail correspondence with participants
April	Personal interviews with Tim, Janice and Susan
April	Follow-up session - story writing and focus groups - co-facilitator, Jim McCaughey
May	Group works on official board response to standards
May	Follow-up interview with M. Demsey
September	Group meets again to plan in-service on standards
October	Follow up interviews

Data Collection

Data collection sources and strategies were aligned with the events. Participant observation notes were recorded at the workshops by the researcher, co-facilitator and coordinator. Written feedback from participants was gathered at the end of both sessions. All e-mail correspondence was recorded. Two 60-minute focus groups were audio taped and transcribed. Three teachers participated in a 90-minute group interview supplemented by an individual interview with Margaret. The co-facilitator, Jim McCaughy debriefed session two. The teachers' stories, told in session one and written in session two, provided a rich source of data on teaching. Other documents included all board/researcher memo correspondence, the board's new teacher appraisal document and my research journal notes.

Narrative Description of the Case

There were several stages in the OCDSB project. The first was to present information to the participants and facilitate discussion in a workshop format about the development of the standards, their purpose and intent. Since teachers had been sent the document ahead of time, some were quite familiar with the contents, others were reacting to new material. Time was spent in small group activities that fostered understanding about the nature of standards, sharing examples of practice from the standards. My purpose for the day was to have the group leave with a clear understanding of the standards as **descriptors** of practice, to be used as the foundation for professional growth through accredited teacher education programs. However, accreditation and programs are abstract notions and we found that teachers want to see themselves in a concrete sense within a description of the profession. The workshop format encouraged personal connections and reactions to the standards beyond program considerations as the teachers joined in conversations about best practices. By the afternoon, this core group of 24 were probably the most knowledgeable about the standards in the board and as such were invited to look at the board's new teacher appraisal document through the

perspective of the standards on which it had been based. I had structured the second session to follow in two months to allow processing time for internalizing the standards and completing some personal writing. It was my intent to collect data about their impressions by conducting focus groups, interviews and structured writing activities at the second session.

Participant Expectations

What were the expectations of the participants for the sessions? The teachers provided valuable written feedback after day one. As one participant explained, "*You have convinced a lot of cynical people that these standards are at least a good start. No easy feat. We now see the relevancy of the idea*". Another teacher admitted," *I came to this course both ignorant and skeptical. I leave with much information and much to ponder*". The majority of the teachers were pleased to be a part of the development process. "*Involving teachers in the process is the key to sustainability of change. The credibility of the standard descriptors will only increase if they are grounded in reality, coming from actual teachers.*" Some expressed disappointment that they had not been a part of the first writing stage. In general responses highlighted some uncertainty about the exact purpose of the validation session and their role in it, followed by a positive reaction to the information presented. A particularly positive focus centered on "the opportunity to discuss and hear a variety of perspectives from different teachers." Many stressed the need for tangible support; "*Frustrations abound… while the goals of the standards are noble, the funding, time and ability of teachers to achieve them are dubious.*" One participant spelled it out clearly, "The *purpose of today's session was both useful and upsetting. There are many changes that still need to be made in the teaching profession.*" Their comments reflected my journal notes as I observed:

When the group arrived, I perceived a polite but reserved tone. There was little doubt that they were reserving judgment to see what this person from the College would say. I gave them my background as teacher right away to make connections. They sat in small groups and listened intently to the overview of the college. They seemed relieved to hear about the process of creating the standards. I tried to answer all the questions directly. Gradually I sensed a relaxing of body language and laughter began to run through the room. The collaborative activity on definitions of standards really opened up the group.

Margaret also recalled: *You lead people to a brief history and how the standards came to be and in terms of body language and the questions, there were the naysayers or skeptics and there were others who were saying this is what I wanted to hear. The outcome for this session was risky….you did a skilled job at giving information, inviting their comments, validating where you could, letting people vent and gradually it turned to focus on everybody looking at teaching as a real art and the resistance just disappeared.*

A participant's view corroborated our observations. *Because I want to do something new every year I came in with an open and positive mind. As the day unfolded the credibility and language of the standards came through for me. This was pretty impressive. It was giving language and meaning …it was respectful of the complexity of teaching. I was proud of this document. People around my table… there was a certain degree of skepticism, a kind of pulling back, wait and see, check it out ….And I felt there was a shift during the course of the day for people to say you know this isn't bad …there was more hope at the end of the day ..in a sort of group sense.*

The participants quickly gained confidence in the process and in me and as the day moved forward, the intensity of dialogue increased. This feeling was confirmed when teachers rated the program on a 1(low)-5(high) scale, 89% chose either the 4 or 5 range. This change of attitude in a research group as information is shared and the opportunity for dialogue is extended is an important issue as we move ahead with standards implementation. In this case the document was presented by one of its authors. I was able to provide rationales and explanations, anecdotes and experience to give the document a depth and richness not available in a simple reading. Yet the document is now in the public domain with a wide distribution with no "biased" author attached. The creators no longer "own" the document. How do we communicate through words alone the intent of the *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession*? This question remains.

Development of Issues

Findings from the Inquiry

The second phase of the study involved follow-up interviews, focus groups and a directed writing activity. From the interviews and focus groups several issues emerged. They centered on standards and stories, professionalism, mentoring and standards implementation. The data indicated that if the standards of practice were introduced to College members in a positive, informed manner, that they would be perceived as enhancing **teacher professionalism.** Most participants believed that this sense of professionalism already exists and would resist any moves towards mandatory professional development based on the standards. Instead they see the standards as a positive catalyst to foster professionalism by:

- **talking about teaching practice**
- **developing a common language to engage in that conversation**
- **creating a shared space for mentoring new teachers**

Talking about the practice of teaching was celebrated by this group.

- *"What I really rejoice about in this document is we're finally talking about the practice of what we do not just the products kids are creating."*
- *The teaching practice section is the key. This is what separates us from other knowledgeable people in the community.*
- *It gives teachers an opportunity to sit down and be proud if the things they already do and have included in practice.....Often we talk without something in front of us. This document allows us to focus specifically.*

The teachers felt that the standards fostered a common language to discuss the practice of teaching.

- *I now realize the amount of work that had gone into naming what we actually do. I was thrilled to have it on paper.*
- *I felt more and more that I had words to match all the things that I do*

- *It gives language meaning to …it is respectful of the complexity of teaching*
- *The language of the document gives a focus for people to sit down and discuss what they do well.*

Participants believed this common language would benefit new teachers, that the standards would provide a "common ground" for establishing a mentoring relationship with a more experienced teacher. One participant visualized the standards as *"a table"* on which to place professional issues. They felt that the standards were critical to the growth and development of new teachers, a vehicle through which they might understand the complexity of teaching. At the same time, most were concerned that novices would be overwhelmed and afraid trying to reach such lofty standards without the support many of them received in their induction period. A first year teacher in the focus group disagreed with her more experienced peers voicing her opinion *"You **can** use these words, like a standard to rise above."*

The group cautioned against the standards being used as a simplified checklist of discrete competencies, what one teacher called "a wedge". *I think we have to be really careful to make sure these descriptors do not evolve into some kind of benchmark.* They also were adamant about retaining decision making over their own professional growth. *Its not a bench mark to be achieved and if you don't, you must respond in a formal course or other things …a hoop to jump through.* A high school teacher thoughtfully suggested: *We have to attend to legitimating our learning in some way and at the same time doing the things that will keep you rich of mind and loving what you do during the day.* Her colleague held an even stronger view. *The whole point of this document is to celebrate the complexity of teaching …if they try to narrow it down to a mandatory step by step approach … well don't waste my time! We are all professionals here.*

There was general agreement that the standards could provide an excellent way to describe the *good products* of the public education system. The group felt that the standards could form the foundation of a broader public communication strategy. *How are we going to transfer our positive feeling about the Standards of Practice in our role as teachers to the general public?* Several teachers suggested that the federations, working

with the College, take a more positive and active role in helping teachers understand the intent of the document. One focus group recommended a simplified version of the document like a poster or chart to be visually assessable in every staff room and office and stressed the significance the principals' support.

Using the Standards for Professional Growth

During the interviews, three teachers spoke frankly about their introduction to the standards and how their impressions changed as they worked with them. All three were interested in the possibility of using the document for professional growth. A profile of each teacher is included below:

Tim

Tim has been a high school English teacher for 25 years and characterizes his evident energy and passion for teaching as taking opportunities "to jump off the deep end and get into something I know nothing about". Constantly taking on new challenges like a new technology program and mentoring student teachers, he is an articulate advocate of the profession. After 25 years he finally feels that he has something to say. When Tim speaks, others listen. His language is filled with metaphor, his words drawn from the affective domain.

Janice

Janice is also a secondary teacher with 10 years experience, most of it with special needs children. Her background includes working for childrens aid, the government and as a cocktail waitress, which perhaps accounts for her strong opinions about learning from experience. Janice is disillusioned with traditional teacher education and believes that the standards "in eloquent, yet clear language... name what we do". Presently, she teaches a learning strategies class with LD students. Her room, where we met for the group interview, is filled with multi-media collage presentations and student work and awards. Every space is covered..... with papers, books, a sound system. Posters of encouragement add brilliant colour to the walls. Janice's voice and demeanor are warm and welcoming, echoing her room.

Susan

Susan, a grade eight Immersion teacher, is currently working towards her principal's certification. This is a young teacher on the move, eager to demonstrate her leadership style. Her teacher talk is sprinkled with leadership terminology and the latest educational vocabulary. She tries on the language as one tries on a new coat. Susan has taught for 8 years at alternative and regular schools in French Immersion Programs. She too is passionate about the profession and her place in the educational community.

In the triad interview they share their concerns about how the document will be understood in terms of professional growth. I present the data from that interview in a composed "script." The data is taken directly from the interview and shaped into an "imaginary" dialogue among the three teachers. I have chosen a phrase used by Tim as he speaks of acquiring professional knowledge to preface the dialogue.

It Takes a Lifetime

Janice: When I heard about the standards, I thought it was another thing that is going to be imposed ....one more thing to learn about... just another thing to go to.

Susan: I learned about them at the principals course ...when we looked at the standards, it was a mixture of intellectual and affective responses. We felt strong about some components and felt shock about our lack in others...but my own colleagues at school ....they just haven't seen it.

Tim: I first heard about them through my principal who invited me here. And I've learned a lot about their development and the research and I thought wow this is impressive...the language of the standards came through for me...I'm proud of this document.

Janice: I felt disappointed when I heard about standards. I thought, where is the support? How would the standards change anything?

Susan: I think it will change things. But then I have been working very hard at my professionalism at this point of my career so it's easy to see myself in the realm of the standards. I found them very validating. We need to overtly state that we are professionals. We know we're professionals. We have been for years but if we need to play the political game and the educative game to let people know, then let's do it !

Tim: It's not political. it's like a beacon and I'm sailing and I'm just checking in and saying yep, I want to set my course and move this way and that's what excites me.

Janice: When I learned who was talking about the standards and listened, I became more and more hopeful. I looked at the standards with a connection to people as opposed to just another thing. I just hope it doesn't get hooked in directly with evaluation

Tim: You know it never ever struck me that it belonged to an evaluation. It belonged to me as teacher to name what point I 'm at in my career. It wasn't the wording of the document that excited me, it was the vision. It was open ended...it was saying to me as a teacher, who is a learner go with what you've got! Where do you want to go in your learning. Where do you want to go in your teaching? It was the open endedness that excited me because sometimes I like to fly solo at times. I sail solo you know! And there seems to be room in this document , a flexibility .....

Janice Yes! It brings out the human side of us ... of the College.... not just political stuff

Susan: As long as people see it that way and not as overwhelming...I am cautious about how teachers will take these abstract ideas.... maybe if they can break it down ...like what would they need to know in their first

years? I'm at a point in my career where I love this stuff. I have the knowledge base to deal with it

Jacquie: I think most teachers will be comfortable with it ….they can say yes, yes, yes here is what I do. It needs to be hard not baby stuff …but another thing we have to get principals on board!

Tim: I think this is really just the first step and I'm afraid of what will happen to this document. We came to this session we heard and understood but people are going to go into a panic attack. First and second year teachers looking at teaching practice! If they only knew that it will take years. It takes a lifetime!

The education aspect of this document is so important, its huge and I've seen so many documents get lost ! How can we respectfully present this as a model, as a tool , as a mirror?

What can we take from this conversation about standards? First that these particular teachers welcome the concept of the standards, the language, the vision, seeing the standards as a tool for growth. They see the standards as achievable even if it takes a lifetime. They believe that new teachers could be overwhelmed if they misunderstood the intent. They are worried about how the standards will be used and that the original purpose may be lost. This conversation identifies clearly issues that need to be addressed as we undertake further implementation.

Making Sense of the Standards through Story

An important data gathering strategy in this case study was the inclusion of the written accounts of practice. From my experience at another case study site I knew that it is

much easier for teachers to talk about teaching experience than write about it. In the previous study I had asked the teachers to look at the standards first and then pull out an experience based on a key element. The participants told their stories to partners enthusiastically but did not complete the written component of the task. Accordingly, when I planned the Ottawa/Carleton session, I invited a co-facilitator to lead the writing section while I conducted the focus group. Jim, a retired principal, began with a pre-writing activity that included a visualization exercise. He invited teachers to think of key events and teaching stories focusing on "a captured moment" in time. Working with partners to share their ideas they produced texts which they subsequently reconstructed in terms of the standards. In other words the process was reversed so that the story came first, then the reflection on the standards. Tim's metaphorical account presented in the introduction is an example of how teachers can personalize their work within the standards of practice, all the while realizing that the standards are essentially meant for programs. Susan put it this way:

> *The way we told our stories today… we need to include them when we give out the document. We have a set of stories that goes along with this and a set of goals as well. If I was introducing the document to my team division meeting I would say, "tell me some of the stories where you see yourself in the standards". We don't often talk about where we come from. If somebody understood that my philosophy had to do with this and I am basing my story on my philosophy then they will understand and appreciate in the same way I need to do with them. We could speak the same language. I would say, you know I saw a story in you……*

The following stories written by the teachers reflect a range of professional interests and personalities and styles of writing. The accounts, however all share the same foundation within the standard of *commitment to students and student learning*. The six examples also point to reflective practice as a significant professional learning strategy as each teacher shares an example of learning from experience in the telling of their story.

Story One

Janice's story reveals this commitment to her special needs students and her belief in the concept of teacher as learner as she gains new insights about herself from these students.

The World in a Room

Listening, watching, I hear, I feel, I see: their learning styles, their learning strengths and weaknesses unfold. The collage presentation was an opportunity not to be missed. Not to be evaluated, only to be respected. Laura presented her black box. Jillian's shiny gold paper wrapped her strong side, her shadow side on the reverse was grey and muted. Amy showed us her unfolding "formula" for success, Darren his brick wall, naming his mom as the mortar. Such richness of thought, such personal revelation, so many different styles, personalities.

It gave me a new starting point and another perspective to be re-learned. Learning happens outside the school. I, as teacher, am only part of the continuum. We are important! But as teachers, we can include in our class time an opportunity to watch and slow down and feel less significant. There is power in this.

I think at times I teach as I was taught and despair. Then I remember that I have worked so hard to approach the job and students differently than I experienced. It's a strange balance, looking back, looking forward, looking in – doing – all in the context of being good and yet being willing to grow. I loved the 10 periods of college presentations. I saw the whole world in one room.

Janice's account is based on her understanding of on-going professional learning, that this learning need not be structured in courses but can be discovered by attending to the students and self. She "*reflects on her practice and learns from experience*". She "*learns with and from her students…in a community of learners.*"

Story Two

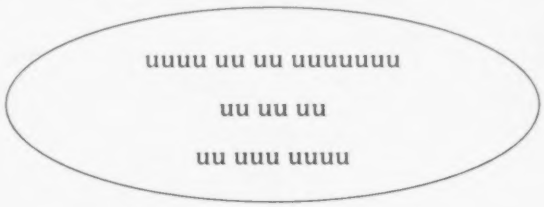
Jennifer is a primary teacher close to retirement . Her story captures the essence of early childhood teaching experience. From her young pupil she learns that she does not always know the answers. Recognizing the value of "examining oneself" she embraces the notion of lifelong learning as she makes her exit from the profession.

I Can't Read Yet Either

My teaching career began in Australia and after a leap in time and distance I returned to teach in Canada. Suddenly I knew nothing.

So I decided this was a chance to begin again. Whole language had just come on the scene. It fit my philosophy well. The whole curriculum and the whole child. I went to workshops and loved being able to return to the classroom with useful ideas I could use the next day.

I remember a Grade 1 class where the students were writing. Some were using various levels of invented spelling, but Alexander' page looked more like this



Just squiggles – but there was left and right progression and a sense of "errors". I went over and said "Alexander, that's wonderful! Now could you read it to me?"

He looked up at me very matter-of-factly and stated "I can't <u>read</u> either".

Why do I remember this? Perhaps it links to the following event.

Fast forward to a conference in Kingston with Alice Yardley as the guest speaker. A gracious, enthusiastic woman whose "thoughts" are pinned to the wall beside my desk. She stresses the absolute importance of the teacher's philosophy. What we think or believe affects what we do. How we organize ourselves, our classroom, how we plan, how we teach, how we help children learn are all based on our philosophy

Thank you Alexander and Alice. You both taught me to examine myself.

Story Three

Twenty years after it happened, Lila's story is still clearly recalled. It does not centre on knowledge of curriculum or teaching strategies but on the needs of one little boy. It speaks eloquently about *commitment to students* and meeting their physical social and emotional need trying to accommodate their differences and family situations. She connects her story to the standard dealing with *leadership and community* as she strives *to exercise professional integrity and judgment.*

Michael's Story

Twenty years ago after raising my own children, I came back to teaching. I taught grade 1, 2 and 3 in a local school. In my class was Michael. He and his younger brother often arrived at school without breakfast or lunch and in winter they had only thin jackets with no boots or gloves. Other days, usually at the end of the month, they arrived in a taxi with $20 for lunch at the restaurant across the street. Michael's behaviour was a problem for all of us. He would run across desks, crawl under desks, escape from the class and scream obscenities at us. On his good days Michael showed strong ability and a loving personality. His mother, a member of a motorcycle club came to an interview dressed in her best leather riding outfit. In her own way though, she loved her boys dearly.

Shortly into the spring term, she handed her children over to CAS. I was called into the office and informed. I broke into tears and offered to take Michael myself for I truly cared for him. He was a great little kid who needed a stable environment with clear expectations.

This emotional day has remained with me forever. My principal counseled me to not become too "emotionally attached" to the children I teach. Over the years my "skin has toughened" considerably but I still have children I "worry" about and fume inwardly at our inability to help them.
Michael once wrote me a letter in which he mentioned having had a salad. He'd never tasted one before.

Story Four

Gwynneth's story is one of relationship with students, building trust and respect. She is aware of the unwritten curriculum which is part of her professional knowledge and how she connects that curriculum to the students experience. She identifies ethical issues of trust and confidentiality.

Assume Nothing

For a week before my "moment" the grade 8s had been having a health unit on S.T D's with another teacher. On a Monday morning when my class arrived, I sensed a high level of stress among the group of boys.

All during math class, a collaborative activity, hushed whispers, obviously unrelated to the assignment occurred. At the end of the period, the bell rang and one fourteen year old boy remained behind. He told me of going to a friend's home to play. He spoke of Kevin's father who was suffering with AIDS. The boy was extremely nervous as his hands clenched and unclenched and he kept running his tongue over his lips. " Friday night, I tore my sweater" he whispered. "Kevin lent me his mom's sewing kit to fix it. " Then my terrified student,, speaking very slowly, using almost no sound continued. "I pricked my finger with the needle. Could I have AIDS now?"

This student was not unworldly in his knowledge. He played hockey in an Atom A league. He had been fortunate to be given very supportive, caring parents. He had obviously been worried all week-end and finally came to me, his teacher, to ask this crucial question.

From this incident, I learned two important lessons.

Assume nothing.

And secondly, I was reminded that I, as teacher, had earned their respect.

Story Five

John is a secondary History teacher who recalls a teaching moment in which he was able to "*link the curriculum and learning experiences to everyday life.* "

Learning from Each Other

*Teaching Ancient Civilizations to grade 11s and 12s, we began a lesson on Greek architecture and art. Studying a photo of a Greek sculpture of a male figure, I noted that the Greeks were trying to embody the ideal human form – something consistent with their culture. Often this discussion can veer to a pall of glazed eyes, but when I asked this class if "we, today, had changed much, and if there was anything wrong with celebrating a physical ideal through art" the class lit up into a discussion on body image, popular culture today – tv, movies, magazines – celebrities and the pressures it imposes on people to achieve/conform. This branched off into the difficulties faced by teens who looked "different," dressed "differently" or acted "differently" than what was perceived to be the norm. The class also brought up the lengths some will go to achieve this "norm" such as dieting/bulimia, or steroids A class that I was expecting to just be politely indifferent got into a free-ranging, animated, open discussion that struck every nerve. I *was thrilled to find myself a facilitator and learner – not a teacher – as the class opened each others eyes.*

In the end we brought it back to the Greeks and whether we had changed that much and what it is that makes us celebrate such things. From a simple picture of Ancient Greece, the students left that class with a better understanding of themselves, each other, and even, perhaps, the continuity of this through history.

Delighted to see himself in a new facilitator's role, he came to understand from this experience" *that teaching practice is enhanced by many forms of knowledge and ways of knowing.* In terms of his own learning, he recognized how" *knowledge in his subject area is created linked to other subjects and applied to life experience*". By analyzing his story he highlighted the notions of "*helping students to appreciate their own identity*" and " *becoming active, inquisitive and discerning citizens*". He had created "*opportunities for students to share their learning with their classmates*".

Reflections on the Stories

As researcher I selected these particular stories to illustrate how six teachers were making sense of the standards and to demonstrate how they were able to story exemplars of practice. From this set of six stories written by classroom teachers within a workshop setting several themes emerge. First there is a common focus on commitment to students and student learning. Each story unfolds with a student or a particular class as a central character and involves the teacher learning from that student. In addition each teacher discovered an insight about professional learning in the telling of the story and was able to relate the teaching practice identified in the story to key elements in the standards. In this way the standards come to life through story encouraging the reader to go beyond the text and relate the narratives to their own practice.

As Susan, one of the three profiled teachers, explained in the introduction to the stories, the accounts make visible the teachers' philosophies by illustrating through narrative, the principles of teaching and learning they consider important. Delong and Whitehead (1998) also advocate a storied approach to the standards as they investigate the links between action research, teacher professionalism and the standards of practice. They suggest that *"the standards of practice are the living values which are embodied in the teachers form of life. Their meanings are not communicated in linguistic lists with universal applicability. Their meanings are communicated through the descriptions and explanations which teachers create for their own professional learning "*

Implications of the Study

The *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession,* through the accreditation process, will directly impact the contexts for teaching, teacher education and professional learning in Ontario. In this set of case studies we were interested in learning more about how individual teachers understood the purpose and intent of the standards of practice and how the document might affect their teaching practice. We explored how teachers' stories might bring the abstract principles of standards into the reality of teaching experience. In each case the recalled stories indicated that the teachers learned from experience rather than a formal opportunity. The writing activity prompted the participants to see the standards of practice as descriptors embedded in the context of

their story. They recognized the value of reflective practice, the value of "examining oneself, of looking in, assuming nothing."

According to the teacher responses this research project provided an opportunity for further collaborative professional growth for the participants. Their involvement was actually extended as this particular group requested to stay together over the next year to help implement the standards within their board. They also met with the principal co-ordinator to compose a formal board response to the document.

We learned that given the time to explore the standards document collaboratively, with a resource person guiding the process, the teachers saw strong connections within the document to their work. They could "see themselves" and their work within the standards. It appears from this partnership study that very little time is needed for teachers to reach a comfort level with the standards of practice, if that time is designed so that they have an opportunity to become familiar with the document and relate it to their own practice.

This report has provided a summary of the findings from one case study involving classroom teachers relating the standards document to their specific practice. It focuses on how that understanding was gained through the sharing of stories of practice in a specific workshop format. Further collaborative research would be useful to determine the next steps for communicating the intent and content of the *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession* to college members not involved in similar workshop activities. The analysis of the teacher stories, data from the focus groups and interviews add a depth of understanding to the validation process and provide valuable formative feedback as we prepare to bring the document to the Council for final approval.

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